

Covet Earnestly the Best Gifts

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Among all the varied spiritual gifts that God gives to His people today, the greatest is that of prophesying or speaking forth the truth of God for the edification of the church. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the Apostle Paul lists "prophets" as second only to the apostles themselves in importance for the spiritual well-being of the body of Christ on earth (I Cor. 12:28).

In the Early Church prophets often received direct revelation from God (Acts 11:28); whereas today true prophets set forth the truths that have been incorporated by the Holy Spirit into the Word of God. In both cases, however, the gift of prophecy has as its goal the edification or spiritual strengthening of the church (I Cor. 14:1-12).

Most Christians who have had any teaching on the subject of spiritual gifts are aware of the fact that the Holy Spirit has given to *every* believer one or more gifts (I Cor. 12:4-11), and that some gifts are more important than others (I Cor. 12:28). Not many seem to have grasped the fact that God does not expect us to be content with the lesser gifts, but instead commands us to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (I Cor. 12:31). In other words, the best gifts are not

reserved for a chosen elite among Christians (with the obvious exception of the apostleship), but are to be sought earnestly by *all* Christians! And why should we earnestly covet them? Because with the best gifts we can more effectively serve our wonderful Lord and serve the church which is His body.

The gift of preaching (or "prophesying") is of supreme importance in the church today because Christians are in desperate and continual need of being fed the truths of God's Word. Our Lord, shortly following His resurrection, commanded Peter: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). Peter himself with these words throbbing in his soul wrote in turn to pastors that were under his influence: "Feed the flock of God which is among you" (I Pet. 5:2). The Apostle Paul, after three years of ministry in Ephesus which was largely occupied in teaching "all the counsel of God" to a group of faithful men "in the school of one Tyrannus" (Acts 20:27; 19:9), earnestly admonished these Ephesian elders to "feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). In his very last epistle, the aged Apostle revealed to young Timothy the basic principle which had guided his own

missionary service and which would prove to be the most fruitful for Timothy: "The things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2).

In the light of these passages of Scripture, we may safely conclude that the greatest need of the hour is for men who will covet earnestly the best gifts; who will give themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4); who will learn how to "feed the flock of God"; however long or difficult might be the task of preparing for such a ministry. We need to be reminded today, when lesser and perhaps more spectacular gifts are given the pre-eminence among Christians, that "elders that rule well" are to be "counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17). Double honor is to be accorded such elders, for they are twice as effective in the hands of God "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). May God grant to many more of us in these dark days a desire to possess and to use for His glory the best gifts.